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Architectura Transtopica: Totems of a Journeyman

Ioannis Galanopoulos Papavasileiou

ABSTRACT

The creative project *Architectura Transtopica: Totems of a Journeyman* argues in favour of using and interpreting fixed architectural structures as metaphors and symbols of expatriation. The primary inquiry of this paper is to consider how autobiographic re-enactments of lived experiences with architecture, triggered by non-country specific places, illustrate one's life journey. Building on studies that are at the intersection of social and cultural studies, humanistic geography, evolutionary ecology, anthropology, art and architecture (Alahdadi, 2018; Avci et al., 2017; Kunz, 2016; Martin et al., 2015; Cotton, 2015; Mathur, 2011; Cresswell, 2006; Relph, 1977), I contend here that producing creative parallels of expatriation and the self in transience through fixed structures involves a concrete representational framework. In what follows, I offer insights on the conceptual fabrication, representational framework, and expanded photographic practices I followed for the completion of *Architectura Transtopica*. Drawing from practice and theory concepts synthetically, I present visual examples, complimented with an analysis on how fixed architectural structures can become emblematic in order to communicate the intricacies of expatriation and selfhood facing the self in transience.

Keywords: Architecture and the Built Environment, Expanded Photography, Expatriation, Home, Social and Cultural Integration.

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I. INTRODUCTION: CREATION OF WORK AND PRODUCTION SPECIFICS

The title of this paper favours the use and interpretation of architectural structures as metaphors and symbols of expatriation, mobility, transient identity, and place un-specificity. The works shown in Fig. 1 seek to manifest how autobiographic re-enactments of lived experiences with architecture, triggered by non-country specific places, illustrate one's life journey. Drawing from practice and theory concepts simultaneously, the paper includes visual examples and a narration on the conceptual fabrication, representational framework, and expanded photographic practices I followed for the creation of the project *Architectura Transtopica*.



Fig. 1. (a) and (b); Works from *Architectura Transtopica*.

Expatriation means the choice made by an individual to leave one's home temporarily and re-settle in another country. Expatriation is different from immigration, which implies permanence. Expatriation is a form of transience. Frequent transits, a common drill for 'expats,' (see: Fechter, 2007; Leonard, 2010; Walsh, 2010; 2012; 2014), Kunz (2016) and Galanopoulos-Papavasileiou (2022, p. 8) are associated with the psychosocial experience of leaving one's home for another. Transient citizens like myself face the

complication of perpetually losing, de-rooting themselves from a place they could call ‘home’.

Being an expatriate for 14 years and feeling like a perpetual traveller, within today’s ease of global mobility, I am concerned with the way social and psychological circumstances of expatriation affect one’s imagery and how does this imagery inform and has informed the lives of others. Historically, in pre-modern Europe, painters, architects, and artisans travelled to work abroad and develop their crafts thanks to the practice of apprenticeships. Their foreign relocation was expected to last years, before the artist could return and practice. This is what Koerner calls “the journeyman years” (Koerner, 2017, p. 35; Galanopoulos-Papavasileiou, 2023, p. 7). The title of the project draws allegiance to this historical occurrence.

Within these concepts, my subjects in *Architectura Transtopica: Totems of a Journeyman* are the built environment and architecture. Colourful structures, facades, and architectural details are my protagonists that are apparently universal and in a state of banality. They look like they intervene with the human condition with a cause that is not really straightforward. I encounter them by accident in cities I reside, work and travel, therefore they are not bound to a specific geographical territory, its politics and cultural history (Galanopoulos-Papavasileiou & Hulbert, 2023, p. 11). As a matter of fact, I never plan, or hardly ever go back to the same place for a retake. Throughout *Architectura Transtopica*, we become acquainted with a variety of structures. From civic institutions to private buildings, these pieces of our built environment are stripped out of context through a sense of individuality, which can never be grasped if one commutes from point A to B daily, from suburbs to the city and vice-versa. Walking is a lifestyle needed for an encounter with such structures.

The facades in Fig. 2 show representational elements and the close framing and cropping of the images prohibit the view of the whole structure, therefore each one extends beyond the frame to the realm of imagination. Hence the viewer can imagine my walks, thoughts and feelings and become aware of my life’s story and the aftermath of a peripatetic life. Which in fact is the core function of any street photography image, semantically at least. The blocking of such images and their frontality flags the viewer to engage conceptually with these representations of the built environment.

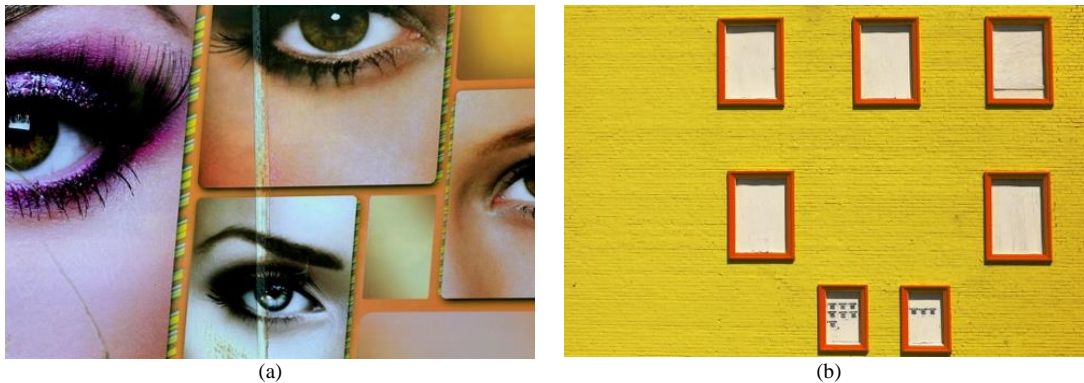


Fig. 2. (a) and (b) Facades from *Architectura Transtopica*.

The works show unpeopled places, but through emphatic story telling methods; symbolism through on and off camera manipulation, we clearly trace the human presence, the use-value and function of these structures. Animated by composition, colour, pattern, repetition, light and shadow rigorously composed or recomposed by the editing software, most structures establish an illusionistic spatial order and a viewing of narrow depth, through axonometric perspective (Galanopoulos-Papavasileiou, 2020, p. 47). Some architectural details become eye level viewings, although buildings are mostly standing higher than the human eye. Although some image creation recipes are repeated there are many images that show variety in terms of representation. This is evident when the human ‘invisible presence’ overshadows the architectural form or when architectural details become objectified and the only way to view them is as sculptural artifacts.

Dominant colours are primary ones (Fig. 3). There is no diffusion of light and no attempt at conveying any sense of spirituality or meditation of the kind that sells the work of the architect. The architect, whose work is partially appropriated remains anonymous. Colours obviously serve as a mood barometer and are an essential tool of the practice. They speak of expatriation and visual pleasure, the sense of place and of perception of the built environment. They hint at expatriation as a joyful experience, but one somewhat unresolved. This is because, the colours I use in abundance create a distance with these structures and open a delicate discussion with the viewer on what is seen as beautiful, temporary, functional, or permanent. Colour is to me a highly idiosyncratic factor of looking at the Anthropocene and one capable to enhance the fabrication of non-country specific places that illustrate one’s life journey.

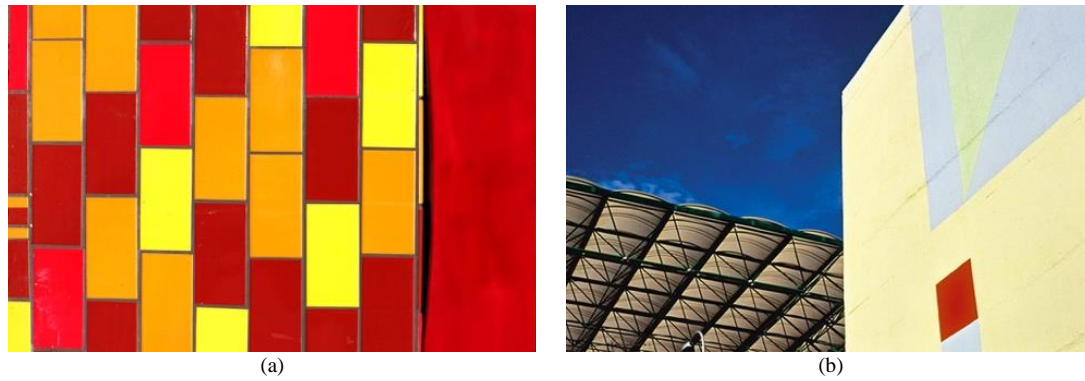


Fig. 3. Facades from Architectura Transtopica.

Naming (tilting) not following the sequence; type of structure, place, use and date, such as in architectural photography (Fig. 4, *Groomed*) and the switch from 35 mm to 6×7 (Fig. 5) format provide an interplay between genre and functionality vs ornamentation that lead back to the identity of the person looking through the camera, capturing and recapturing. The works constantly harken back to an investigation and viewer-artist discourse on place photography, architecture and autoethnography.

Fig. 4. *Groomed* from Architectura Transtopica.Fig. 5. *Square and Stripes* from Architectura Transtopica (6×7 format).

Cities and suburbs are cultural places belonging to anyone and no-one. Here, the public place is claimed as private. *Architectura Transtopica* offers a somewhat subjective examination and representation of a rather becoming place in a non-architectural but perceptual order. The outcome; subjective, under cognitive reconstruction, surfaces hiding reality rather than revealing it, as photography does best. It takes a certain type of citizen with a particular ‘relevant’ history to these countries, cities and/or sites to be able to empathically recognize their subtle, almost mundane presence and hence their causality and importance.

While passing through countries I frequent yearly, I capture non-identifiable, out-of-context sites and out-of-place structures, which become the personal symbols, markers or ‘monuments’ of my expatriation, in turn pointing at my transient identity. These markers shape my personal, imaginary, heterotopic place I call expatria. A home that could be any home, or better, a home within the metaphorical capacity of images (Galanopoulos-Papavasileiou, 2023, p. 6.). The aftermath of these images is an escape from the binaries,

ornamentation vs functionality, mobility vs stability, one place vs many places that lead to the overarching societal dichotomies; one culture vs collective culture and one country vs many. Choice is in the eye of the beholder triggered by the artist's identity, as through the works, there is a dismissal in the aura of cultural specificity. What is at bay with certainty is an enactment of a photographic practice that assimilates into an individualistic play sequence; I walk, observe, capture, recapture, manipulate if needed and, then I walk some more.

One of the core drivers behind these works, apart from walking, is the anticipation of a discovery. Through an urge for discovery, I have adopted modes of working from that of a flâneur to that of a precautions retoucheur, doing much after the capturing in postproduction. I worked in both colour analog film and digital for this project, therefore the traditions of fine art, colour, analog photography heavily inform my practice. I mostly favoured finding my subjects in the immediate environment, as opposed to constructing a non-camera reality in the studio. Residing in different countries and taking pleasure from wandering through urban and suburban areas are the reasons for developing a strong sense of place and for questioning it through my creative process. The colourful structures in *Architectura Transtopica*, including shapes, textures, and symmetries of mundane architecture, are ambivalent in terms of place identity and photographic representation, and have the luxury to be considered neither urban or rural, neither local nor global. In that context, my work assimilates in a topological scavenger hunt. At large, such structures refer to the notion of non-places, or the notion of metaphorical mobile places and contribute to discourses about place, mobility, architecture and the human condition. The aggregation of multiple out-of-context places, however, in a series format elevates this anywhere approach into 'somewhere'. This somewhere is a 'third place', where skies are always blue and where one can find many colourful architectural curiosities.

II. BROADER CONTEXT: REPRESENTATIONAL FRAMEWORKS

Living between the UAE, Greece, France, Italy, and Australia for 14 years has made me contemplate the discourses about representation and lived experience with architecture, expatriation and transience. I realise that I was feeling ill at ease from being mostly indoors in the UAE and mostly outdoors in Greece. I validated my thoughts and feelings on this in the other countries I frequent yearly. I was feeling equally discomforted when I was obliged to spend time in arcades and malls in Melbourne, in famous department stores in Paris, and in conference halls and universities around the world, where I travel for work. At the same time, almost antithetically, thinking about the binaries; transformation vs functionality, mobility vs stability and indoor vs outdoor experiences with architecture, of expatriation and transience, I came to realise that indoors for a temporary expatriate such as myself could mean safety, security, shelter or even home. Nonetheless, the whole place and sense of place experiences were registering in complex split ways in my consciousness. There was something evolutionarily wrong in this experience. Coming from Greece and growing up outdoors, this is a constant reminder that any indoor environment differs from the place I once called home. My dysfunctional experience while being indoors has made me contemplate larger conflicting ideologies of globalization and "globalization 3.0" (Friedman, 2004) and the clash between my origin and the social functions of every new environment and the built environment around it that I am called to adapt to.

Indeed, I am not the only one. There is an obvious affinity of my work to European place photography. Many practitioners have explored practices of portraying autobiographic re-enactments of lived experiences triggered by architectural elements and/or indoor places. Most noteworthy are the works by artists Candida Höfer (in *Architecture of Absence*, 2004) and Thomas Ruff (in *Interiors*, 2012) who both capture indoor, architectural elements, including motifs that stand in 'parallel' with aims of my work. Autobiographical tones are evident in the work of German photographer Candida Hofer. Constance Glenn writes in the forward of Höfer's book *Architecture of Absence* that "Höfer traces her preoccupation with architecture to the devastation (from WWII) she saw as a child in Cologne coupled with her observation of the reconstruction process" (Höfer, 2004, p. 12-13). Ruff's series shows corners of rooms with furnishings and tenants' personal objects; in capturing domestic places and their identity, he investigates through these elements, the identities of those residing there. Ruff's interiors and the objects he features in them could be universal (similar to mine), but instead Ruff instills in them a specific geography. The people and objects he depicts and he himself are not transient and these are houses of his kin in Germany, where Ruff permanently lives and works.

My experience is quite different. The architectural elements in *Architectura Transtopica* are both captured indoors and outdoors (Fig. 6) and are not country-specific; they do not belong to a specific geographical territory, its politics and cultural history. They have been captured between Greece, France, Italy, Australia, UAE, but technically they could have been captured anywhere in the world, which is a recurring aspect in my project. This creates a sense of both an elation and separation from these sites as a state of constant temporariness is projected onto them to indicate a transient life.



Fig. 6. *Subterrainian* from *Architectura Transtopica*.

There are multiple studies reflecting on the way someone's lifestyle impacts one's identity and lived experiences. These studies are at the intersection of social and cultural studies, humanistic geography, evolutionary ecology, anthropology, art and architecture (Alahdadi, 2018; Avci *et al.*, 2017; Kunz, 2016; Martin *et al.*, 2015; Cotton, 2015; Mathur, 2011; Cresswell, 2006; Relph, 1977). Building on Edward Relph's existential insideness and outsideness, people and entities that are very much in place, in a specific location or architectural environment, they may think and feel themselves outside of them and vice versa. Displacement and attachment from place are both spatial and metaphorical. They can be felt both indoors and outdoors, both in one's home country or abroad and they are intrinsic to the human experience of being-in-place and the ways we represent it. Through many place changes and walks, heuristic inquiry, critical analysis and practice, I determined that both indoor and outdoor, seemingly fixed, structures or building facades are suitable to communicate the lived experiences and identity of someone experiencing architecture, in expatria and in transience. To embed such narratives in fixed, anonymous, architectural forms necessitates measurable representational frameworks incorporating: a peripatetic method of capturing; working the public place but capturing it unpeopled; specific vantage points, abstraction (or deletion); meaningful digital pictorial strategies; naming; conceptual minimalism geared towards the negation of the geographic, cultural, and political meanings these structures carried in their original contexts; and deeper engagement in metaphor that can render them emblematic. In that way, as totems of a journeyman they can speak about an autoethnographic experience with architecture and place and their linkage to transient lifestyles.

The determined frameworks are:

- Using abstraction/deletion
- Pictorial strategies
- Conceptual minimalism
- Deeper engagement in metaphor
- Emblematisation.

III. ABSTRACTION/DELETION

The British human geographer Tim Cresswell in *On the Move* (2006) distinguishes between mobility and movement. Movement, he asserts, "is an abstracted notion of mobility without contexts of power in it" (Cresswell, 2006, p. 2). Transience, however, is a movement that carries another abstraction. That is, time. Transience is a movement of temporary time. Expanding on the factor of time, in photographic practice, I realised through *Architectura Transtopica* that I could construct creative parallels of non-geographically specific architecture based on temporary time of observation or temporary viewing. In fact, lens-based photography is primarily a practice of temporary time. A snapshot of an architectural element inhabits roughly a 1/60 of a second in one's lifetime in photography production, and the final images of this project are less than 300. In the documentary film *Contacts* (2009), the late William Klein posits a significant question on temporality and photographic practice, which has informed my views on what transience and impermanence could mean in terms of photographic practice of place. Klein asserts: "A picture is taken at 1/125s. What do you know of a photographer's work? A hundred pictures? Well, it is a body of work that comes to all told one second" (Klein, 2009). Apart from transience as an abstract representation of temporary time, there is also a visual abstraction happening in the images of this project. However, abstraction is not my preferred term for lens-based photography and for this series. I borrow here Luigi Ghirri's term deletion, which pertains not only to framing the image, but to the exclusion of the optical reality that surrounds the framed image and its meanings.

Ghirri in *The Complete Essays* (2016) makes a crucial distinction between abstraction and deletion, which informs the representational framework I devised for this project. He writes:

In photography, the deletion of the space that surrounds the framed image is as important as what is represented; it is thanks to this deletion that the image takes on meaning, becoming measurable. This image continues, of course, in the visible realm of the deleted space, inviting us to see the rest of reality that is not represented. This double aspect of representing and deleting not only evokes the absence of limits, excluding every idea of completeness or finitude, but shows us something that cannot be delimited (Ghirri, 2016, p. 35).

The abstraction of permanent fixed structures and their reduction to architectural details, as with many of the images, without providing the context outside the frame (the deletion described by Ghirri), forces the place/object to look uncommon, absurd, or uncanny. The image is ‘immeasurable,’ and we cannot complete the story of this place or that object. The tension between what I show, the tight frame, and the vantage point I use reinforces what I delete from the optically actual place. The focus on the structures I am photographing at such a close crop removes their ‘true’ material geography, the historical context to which they belong, and the social and political discourses produced through the society that encircles those objects. It is through what we cannot see what the images give us access to; a tension between stasis and being on the move not spatially but metaphorically.

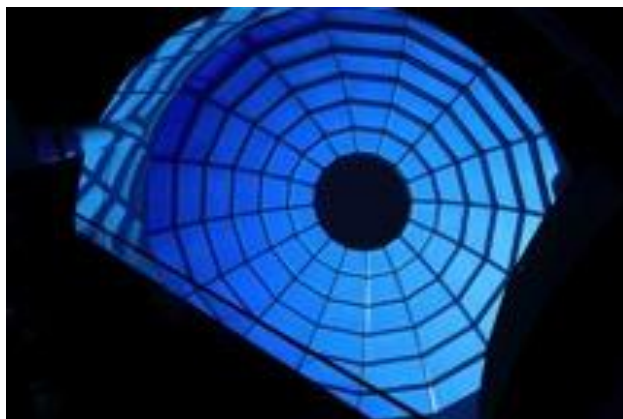


Fig. 7. *The Web* from *Architectura Transtopica*.

The Web (Fig. 7), illustrates the aforementioned ideas, deletion and its capacity to carry unrevealed contexts. The constricted frame reduces place to the architectural detail of the oculus, leaving the context (e.g. expatriation, transience) outside the frame. The structure, if it is an oculus at all, can be featured in both a domestic and a public place. The frame focuses attention on the centre of the image. The structure has a bull’s-eye, a target in the middle. Such a close-up frame challenges material geography and placelessness. Without a historical context or other conceivable social discourses accompanying the image, the weblike structure becomes unusual, irrational, and certainly hard to read. There is a lurking spiritual or psychological undertone fortified by the doctored colours of the surface and the geometry of the structure, which are recurring in all images of the series.

My strategy in the creation of the works in *Architectura Transtopica* is not an on-site performance, but an invitation to discourses about plurality of representation practices in portraying architecture and the built environment, expatriation, and transience. It serves as an illusionistic, crafty hat trick because of its hidden aspects. American critic, curator, and writer Charlotte Cotton, in *Photography Is Magic* (2015) defines expanded photography with its various pictorial strategies as “close-up magic – the kind of intimate, right-in-front-of-you sleight of hand that brings pure wonder and delight” (Cotton, 2015, p. 1). New Zealand academic, curator and writer, Geoffrey Batchen similarly regards photography in the digital age as being an “ectoplasm; an object of mutated untrue realities produced by digitization” (Batchen, 1999, p. 15). For the French critic Roland Barthes, all photography (including straight-up lens-based practice) with its “emanation of past reality” is pure alchemy, “a magic, not an art” (Barthes, 1980, p. 88). Thinking of latest encroachments in digital imaging, AI imaging and language-to-image generative picture making through a plethora of software (e.g. DALL-E 2, Midjourney, Dream Studio, DeepAI, etc.) the latter arguments are intensified.

IV. PICTORIAL STRATEGIES

The works set forward the notion that colouring of captured architectural structures can illustrate the tension and lived experiences of the expatriated individual. The images show geometrical structures that seem on surface to be mathematically calculated and precise. As with all of them, I do not disclose their location. We do not know the structure's scale and sometimes the materials it is made of. Is it a miniature or a sized structure? Is it glass or plastic or metal? The surface of the images is always photographic, clear, and spotless. Rescaling via distancing is a fundamental feature in my work, as it ensures that the objects' ontological presence is confronted but not ignored. A peculiar scale works both visually and mentally. It can be both disturbing and pleasant for the viewer, but in no case is it dismissive of interpretation.

In terms of lighting, there is no diffusion of light in any of the pictures. Only harsh calculated light and mostly primary colors. My repeated numerical colour and its consistency heavily depend on digital editing practices. Using found and equally applied prosthetic digital colour acts as a visual code and a metaphor of contentment through expatriation and transience. Primary colours and their hues and tints add both a layer of tension and unresolved positivity to my images. When expatriates migrate, they hope for better conditions of living, higher salaries, fulfilling their aspirations, and so forth. The colours are there to sublimate the longing for a positive outcome for my expatriation and its complex reasoning and prescribe a path to a paradise that can be reached. Shapes and colours bring to my mind simple things: first bulky, colourful toys and playgrounds with fit-up ship shells for pirate games. In this way, I carry my childhood (my home) anywhere I go. To a new place or the next place.

V. CONCEPTUAL MINIMALISM

The minimalism in the images is driven by framing/abstraction/deletion choices and by colour manipulation. This negates material geography and the associated country-specific, cultural, and political meanings that my permanent structures may carry. By pictorial fabrication I render them as new emblems of expatriation. This process guides the viewer to accept these mutations and that my images work symbolically. All things considered, I am fostering a practice (framework) that strives to freeing my structures from the burdens of factual representation and its modes; indexicality, mimesis, and truth of the photographic sign. If fragmented anonymous (no country specific) pictorially versioned, architectural elements are free from these restrictions and become contextualized, they could carry the meanings of expatriation and transience that I ascribe them. This recontextualisation allows their substance and interpretation range from banal entities to emblems, and deletion and colour manipulation are some soft tools in their production. There is also my allegiance to modern art that connects me to art movements such as Suprematism, Abstract Expressionism, and Minimalism in such works by Kazimir Malevich, Mark Rothko, and Sol Lewitt and the great surrealist photographers Man Ray and Lazlo Moholy-Nagy. But this meta-meaning in the images can only be valid considering the emotive concepts and metaphors I have invested in them. Hence the term 'conceptual minimalism' I use here. The American conceptual artist Lucas Blalock, who uses photography as a venue of complex meanings, writes:

If we think about photography as a limited mimesis, as a poor copy, instead of a good (or indexical) one, then the photographer is not a cataloguer of fact, nor a purveyor of reportage, but instead is participating in this centuries-old activity of drawing the world closer, attending to its conditions, to the terms of our looking, and, in turn, trying to keep the picture collapsing into image (Blalock, 2014, p. 208).

Blalock's possibilities in stretching representation are in looking and picturing everything, everyone, and everywhere. Although our content and objectives are not the same, I find his faith in tampering with representation and altering perception enticing. His pictorial practices encourage complex inter-textual meanings; though in many of his works these strategies materialise with loud visual cues (that is, choppy Photoshop collages, destructive manipulation on the surface of his pictures, and so forth). Such works are definitely conceptual, but not minimalist in using pictorial interventions. My view of minimalism in these works entails conceptual fabrication and overall subtlety in altering the surface of my images. I refrain from turning the surface into a complete sculptural object. The photographic surface, the architecture and the built environment depicted, still conveys my lived experience of expatriation not 'in place', but 'in any place', and it is important to remain intact in the images. The shift in perspective to flatten the real into near-representational form, without taking a complete turn from realism, as well as the use of coloring and titling, creates a quasi deceive-the-eye condition (*trompe-l'œil*) uncommon to formalistic, documentary, and 'radically conceptual' approaches of place.

VI. DEEPER ENGAGEMENT IN METAPHOR

The 2019 Venice exhibition *Rothko in Lampedusa, May You Live in Interesting Times* is one recent exhibition dealing with forced migration and the refugee crisis and one that we can use as another example of conceptual minimalism and metaphor. The curators Francesca Giubilei and Luca Berta write that the common trajectory of the show is Mark Rothko, an American artist of Latvian Jewish decent, “who escaped from the repressive Czarist regime in the beginning of the 20th century” (Venice Art Factory, 2019, p.np) and fled to America. Through the metaphorical title chosen by the curators, Rothko has been made the symbol of the *émigré* artist. Most of Rothko’s early works, however, deal with revamping mythical themes and spiritualism. Later, within the movements of Abstract Expressionism and Minimalism, with emphasis on his colour field paintings, he dealt more with perception, representation, and the unconscious mind than with his life as a forced migrant (NGA website, 2016). But for Giubilei and Berta, Rothko’s lived experience of displacement before and after World War 2 becomes a metaphor. This is the connection that shapes the theme of the show and bridges the gaps between different artworks and practices, which are as multifaceted as drawing, painting, photography, installation, sculpture, and video.

The images of *Architectura Transtopica* are crafty metaphors of the social and existential state of being in expatria triggered by any such place and the architecture in it, and what I think and feel when encountering them. Consequentially, they show that my inner world has a metaphoric, but interwoven relationship to the structure I am experiencing. How does a non-temporary structure such as a roof outlet or balcony relate to my personal and social and psychological experience of the place? The answer is the following: in the same way that our bodies connect to our mind to produce thoughts, feelings, and emotions or in the same way our society connects to culture to produce an experience of a place: by interfacing. The structures, to put it simply, is the outlet that connects the outside with the inside, the here and there, the future and the past. Metaphorically, it is an interface linking my previous experiences of places where I lived in the past, the place where I live now, and the place where I wish to live next. A position abroad, a post outside one’s home country functions metaphorically as a facade. It is a springboard for a different life, but for me it is also a trajectory: an invisible line, an equator that connects previous places registered in my mind as home to the one I can observe now. The fictional space created in-between helps chart an invisible map that feeds back to incidents of my expatriation. My autobiography.

VII. EMBLEMATISATION

The structures in *Architectura Transtopica* are not about the place itself. They might even be miniature sculptures photographed, as in the work of Thomas Demand for example whose photographs of sculptural life-size models from cardboard and coloured paper “show pre-existing images culled from the media, usually of a political event” (MOMA.org, 2005). Nevertheless, there is something uncanny, esoteric, or posthumous about my structures. Although the same structures do not appear in the project, they have unquestionably characteristics in common apart from colour. They are geometric. We see shapes in them: circles, triangles, and parallelograms. In a way, they are mathematically calculated structures rendered two-dimensional by photography. Such geometrical structures never fail to attract me, perhaps because of my Greek heritage. They remind me of Euclid and his *Elements of Geometry*, a book now 2,000 years old and one still taught in Greek schools and worldwide, and the Platonic and Archimedean solids I learned in middle school geometry classes. As well as being a topic in elementary mathematics, geometry is also the study of measurements and an instrument of philosophical and existential contemplation within our universal epistemology.

Perfect shapes such as the tetrahedron, the cube, the octahedron, the dodecahedron, and the icosahedron were believed to represent for Plato and his peers the five natural elements: earth, air, fire, water, and the universe as a whole. *The Timaeus*, Plato’s story of the creation of the world, presents the smallest particles, or elements, of matter as regular geometrical figures. It is worthwhile, therefore, to stress that geometry – apart from measuring the world, giving answers to practical matters, and demystifying natural phenomena – could also explain or illustrate personal beliefs, perspectives, and value systems. Geometry can be a method and a system of representation in solving intangible ideas much like art. Both geometry and art use symbols that correspond to specific axioms, which are valid only in their own representational and interpretational framework. If the symbol π , for example, and its algorithmic calculation is a beginning of geometrical and computing measurements for many cultures (Mesopotamians, Greeks, Chinese, Indian, Europeans, etc.) to this date, then the cave paintings at Lascaux in France and foremost the “Makapansgat jasperite cobble” (Bednarik, 2006), a quasi- anthropomorphic pebble, are the beginning symbols of our arts. Over time, some representational symbols become iconic. The value of symbolic, metaphorical, meaning is socially, politically, and culturally constructed. It is ‘agreed upon’ (after necessary discourse) by members of societies, locally and globally. The terms totemic or ‘iconic’ and the process of emblematisation recur throughout the centuries depicting people, places, and events of historical, mythological, and religious

value for the cultures and the individuals that produce them. But before anything becomes an icon, a symbol, an emblem, or a monument, it must be professed as one. It must be represented, fabricated, and codified in visual form.

The permanent architectural elements in *Architectura Transtopica: Totems of a Journeyman* are designed to convey in a codified-through-art way the life of a journeyman and in expatria. With my practice, I extend their signification beyond what we can see in the images. Through conceptual fabrication, deeper engagement in metaphor, and a mixture of expanded practices they become symbols and visual codes that create metaphors. My permanent, colorful, geometric but out-of-geographical-context architectural elements contest and redefine what we should regard as symbols, or emblems of expatriation, mobility, transient identity, and place un-specificity. This is plausible by recontextualisation through robust, representational frameworks (i.e., using abstraction and deletion, conceptual fabrication, digital pictorial strategies), which eradicate the structures' placeness: that is, the material geography, the historical context they belong to, and the social and political ideology that surround them. In that way, I am able ascribe to them and communicate, in an autobiographical way, my volatile state of being in expatria and in transience, and the ways that these life circumstances impact my identity. The new context(s) does not go unnoticed by my viewers. The qualitative visual cues on the images urge them to acknowledge that my structures work symbolically. These colourful, fixed architectural elements have personal totemic value. They become the personal symbols, 'totems' or 'monuments' of my expatriation, in turn pointing at my transient identity. And by this, they seek to gain an increased social and cultural value proving the slipperiness of the prefix '-ex' in the word 'expatriation,' to be associated with individuals in displacement, indoors and temporary structures and expanding its signification.

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